THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

BENGALURU • SATURDAY • AUGUST 16, 2025 • ₹9.00 • PAGES 16 • LATE CITY EDITION

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HIGH-STAKES TRUMP-PUTIN MEET KICKS OFF IN ALASKA

The summit in Alaska on Friday could determine the fate of European security as well as the war in Ukraine

ZELENSKYY'S EXCLUSION A BODY BLOW TO EUROPE

The exclusion of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has already dealt a heavy blow to the West's policy of "nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine." For Putin, the summit with Trump is an opportunity to negotiate a deal that would cement Russia's gains, block Kyiv's bid to join NATO alliance and eventually pull Ukraine into Moscow's orbit

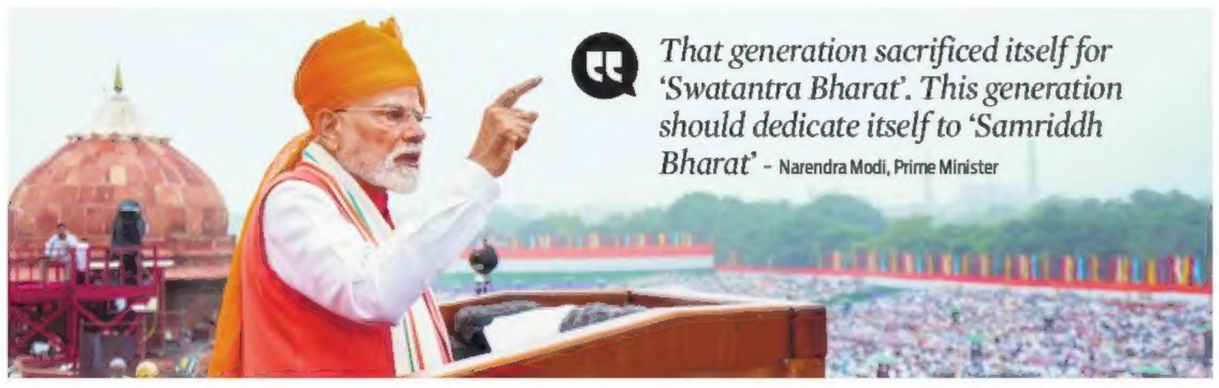
ALASKA SUMMIT A VALIDATION FOR PUTIN

- By bringing Vladimir Putin onto US soil, president Donald Trump is giving Russia's leader the validation he desires after his ostracization following his invasion of Ukraine 3 1/2 years ago
- Trump has warned of "very severe consequences" for Russia if Putin does not agree to end the war after a deal is clinched | P9

25%

CHANCE THAT THE SUMMIT COULD FAIL, DONALD TRUMP SAID IN AN INTERVIEW

CHENNAI ▪ MADURAI ▪ VIJAYAWADA ▪ BENGALURU ▪ KOCHI ▪ HYDERABAD ▪ VISAKHAPATNAM ▪ COIMBATORE ▪ KOZHIKODE ▪ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM ▪ BELAGAVI ▪ BHUBANESWAR ▪ SHIVAMOGGA ▪ MANGALURU ▪ TIRUPATI ▪ TIRUCHY ▪ TIRUNELVELI ▪ SAMBALPUR ▪ HUBBALLI ▪ DHARMAPURI ▪ KOTTAYAM ▪ KANNUR ▪ VILLUPURAM ▪ KOLLAM ▪ TADEPALLIGUDEM ▪ NAGAPATTINAM ▪ THRISSUR ▪ KALABURAGI



That generation sacrificed itself for 'Swatantra Bharat'. This generation should dedicate itself to 'Samriddh Bharat' - Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

Study soon on alteration of demographic fabric: Modi

RAJESH KUMAR THAKUR @ New Delhi

AMID concerns over the US President Donald Trump's tariff action on India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday signalled that India would not succumb to pressure to open up its agriculture sector. Delivering his national address on the 79th Independence Day from the ramparts of the historic Red Fort, Modi sent a strong message that his government would not do anything that goes against the interests of farmers.

He also called for making India self-reliant in every field while announcing a slew of reforms for ease of doing business, simplifying GST, and a state-of-the-art defence shield. Modi said a task force would be set up to push 'next-generation reforms' including revision of GST laws. The task force will complete the work within a set timeframe.

He launched the PM Viksit Bharat Rozgar Yojana to generate 3.5 crore jobs in the next two years. Of these, 1.92 crore beneficiaries will be first timers, entering the workforce.

"India will always protect the interest of its farmers, livestock-keepers, and fishermen unmindful of what may come. Farmers have a huge contribution to the economy of India. The hard work of the farmers of India is paying off," he said.

Modi also flagged attempts to alter the demographic fabric of the country by 'infiltrators', adding that a 'demographic mission' will be set up to study dramatic changes in population. "When demographic changes take place, especially in the border areas, a national security crisis emerges," he said in his record 103-minute address. "Under a well-thought out conspiracy, the demography of the country is being changed. Seeds of a new crisis are being sown. These infiltrators are snatching the livelihood of the youth..." P7

INDIA'S OWN IRON DOME

PM announced Mission Sudarshan Chakra, a national security initiative to build a comprehensive, indigenous defence shield by 2035. It is designed to protect both strategic and civilian infrastructure

PRAISE FOR 'GLORIOUS' RSS

Showering praise on the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Modi hailed 100 years of RSS as a "very proud and glorious" journey of the "world's biggest NGO" and lauded all its volunteers for their dedicated service to the nation

NARI SHAKTI IN EVERY SECTOR

Modi said every sector now "proudly acknowledges" the strength of nari shakti. "From start-ups to the space sector, from the playing fields to the armed forces, our daughters are making their mark"

10X NUCLEAR ENERGY BY 2047

PM said India is rapidly building 10 new nuclear reactors and the plan is to raise nuclear energy capacity tenfold by 2047. Opening it to the private sector will increase the share of green energy in the electricity generation capacities, he added

Just two slabs in next-gen GST reforms by Diwali

PUSHPITA DEY @ New Delhi

IN his Independence Day speech, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the GST rates would be brought down by ushering in the 'next-generation GST reforms' by Diwali. Confirming the move, sources said GST regime will move away from its multiple-rate structure to a simplified one with just two rates—a lower 'standard' slab of 5% and a higher 'merit' slab of 18%. Plus, there will be a category for 'sin goods' such as tobacco, which is likely to be fixed at 40%.

Under the new regime, 99% of the items currently taxed at 12% will move to the 5% slab. Finance ministry officials said the Centre has adopted a three-pillar approach— addressing inverted duty structures, rationalising rates to eliminate multiple tax slabs, and simplifying compliance, particularly for small and medium businesses.

"Most aspirational goods like televisions and refrigerators may now fall under the 5% or 18% slabs. The restructuring is designed to benefit the middle class," an official said.

The finance ministry said the reform will boost core sectors such as agriculture, textiles, renewable energy, healthcare, and insurance. Lower GST on health and life insurance is expected to expand coverage for vulnerable groups, while reduced rates on medicines and medical products aim to strengthen the public health system.

SDRF personnel and firefighters inspect the blast site in Wilson Garden, Bengaluru, on Friday | NAGARAJA GADEKAL

Mysterious blast kills boy, injures 11 in Bengaluru

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

A 10-year-old boy died, while 11 others, including his sister and mother, were injured in a mysterious explosion near Wilson Garden between 8 am and 8.20 am on Friday. Fifteen makeshift houses were damaged in the incident. Though the blast is suspected to have occurred because of a gas cylinder explosion, the exact reason is yet to be ascertained.

The incident occurred at the house of Kasturamma, who is being treated at Victoria Hospital, located in the congested Sri Rama Colony opposite Adugodi post office on DG Road in Chinnayanpalya. The deceased, Mohammed Mubarakulla, was rushed to the Sanjay Gandhi Hospital where he died during treatment.

The injured are identified as Shabeen Bhanu (38), Fathima (8) (mother and sister of Mubarak); Sarasamma (60), Khayal (12), Subramani (62), Aman Jaffar (50), Shrinath, (45), Kasturamma (48), Sheikh Najeebulla (40), Prameela (25), and Rajesh (38). CONTINUED ON: P3

J&K cloudburst toll 60, at least 80 others missing; rescue on

FAYAZ WANI @ Srinagar

BRAVING intermittent rains, rescuers intensified their search for survivors in a cloudburst-hit village in Jammu and Kashmir's Kishtwar district on Friday, even as Chief minister Omar Abdullah put the death toll at 60, with 80 people still missing.

Over 100 people have been injured. Among the dead are mostly pilgrims, local residents and two CISF personnel, who were on duty at the site. An official said the condition of 37 people, among the injured, is critical.

Disaster struck Chisoti, the last motorable village on the way to the Machail Mata temple, around 12.25 pm on Thursday, leaving a trail of death and destruction. Rescuers pulled out 46 bodies on Thursday. Thirty bodies have been identified and handed over to the victims' families.

A large number of people had gathered in Chisoti for the annual Machail Mata pilgrimage that began on July 25 and was scheduled to end on September 5. The 8.5-km trek to the 9,500-foot shrine begins from Chisoti, which is located about 90 km from Kishtwar town. The yatra remained suspended for a second day on Friday.

A local resident said the disaster struck during lunch time when yatris were having lunch at a *langar* setup for Machail Mata Yatra pilgrims.

"The *langar* was full of people. About 300-400 people were present at the *langar* camp when the cloudburst struck. Nothing is known about those trapped in the debris," he said.

Rescue-and-relief operation was suspended late on Thursday night. It resumed on Friday with with the rescuers — from police, Army, NDRF, SDRF and local volunteers — sifting through the rubble to find survivors.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke with the CM and J&K Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Friday and assured them of all help.

CM to CS: Why state authority gave in to Centre at Metro event?

BANSY KALAPPA @ Bengaluru

IN an assertion that has left the state's bureaucracy rattled, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah reportedly pulled up Chief Secretary Shalini Rajneesh over the "complete surrender" of the state's authority during the recent opening of the Yellow Line Metro, which was inaugurated by PM Narendra Modi on August 10.

It is said that Siddaramaiah wanted to know how and why the reins of the prestigious event -- hosted and organised by the state government -- were allegedly handed over to the central team. "Why was the control given to them, when we were the organisers and hosts," the CM is said to have asked pointedly. Eyewitnesses described Rajneesh responding, saying she would "check" the matter.

"This is not done. We organise a programme and allow someone else to take control," Siddaramaiah is supposed to have said.

Even at the Metro line inauguration, Siddaramaiah publicly reminded Modi that Karnataka's contribution to the Yellow Line project was nearly four times that of the Centre, stressing an oft-repeated point that the state has received a raw deal.

AMID DEEP DIVISIONS, PLASTIC TREATY BOMBS

S V KRISHNA CHAITANYA @ Geneva

AFTER three years of negotiations, the United Nations' effort to craft the world's first legally binding treaty to end plastic pollution ended in a "no agreement" here on Friday. Nearly 180 countries failed to agree on a draft text during the final week of talks, with deep divisions over the treaty's scope, how decisions should be made, and whether the deal should target plastic production itself.

TNIE in Switzerland
S V KRISHNA CHAITANYA
@ GENEVA

The collapse followed night-long consultations and a chaotic closing plenary stretching into early hours of Friday. The Chair's revised draft in the morning lacked consensus. By dawn, weary delegates conceded there was no deal.

The fault lines had been visible all week. More than 100 members of the 'High Ambition Coalition' — including the EU and Africa nations— pushed for binding measures to cut plastic production, phase out single-use plastic and adopt reuse and recycling. They also demanded a provision for majority voting at the future Conference of the Parties (COP), arguing that without it the treaty risked being paralysed by a small minority.

Oil-producing states — led by Saudi Arabia, Iran and Russia (Like-Minded Group) — rejected these demands. They insisted the treaty focus on plastic waste management rather than upstream production, and that all decisions must be by consensus. India backed this bloc.

Neelesh Kumar Sah, joint secretary in Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and part of India's delegation, spelt out New Delhi's stance at the plenary. "The instrument we are negotiating has very wide scope. We must ensure the mandate is drawn from the UNEA 5/14 resolution. The scope of the new instrument should be limited to plastic pollution, without overlapping with other environmental pacts." CONTINUED ON: P5

EXPRESS READ

Boy in Bannerghatta safari van hurt after leopard grips arm

BENGALURU: A 12-year-old boy on a leopard safari in Bannerghatta Biological Park on Friday, was injured in a chance encounter with a leopard. The boy had kept his hand outside the meshed non-AC safari bus, when a leopard in the safari enclosure attempted to climb on to the bus, and gripped the boy's arm with its paw | P2

Over 200 dead as heavy rain lashes Pakistan, PoK

ISLAMABAD: At least 214 people were killed and several injured as heavy rain lashed several parts of Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir over the past 36 hours. Most of the deaths occurred in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa after torrential rain triggered flash floods in various districts, which blocked major highways | P9